

Trade Union, Working Class and Reactionary Forms of Struggle

A Trade Union Struggle Experience in Mexico

Introduction

In 2018, our collective developed a struggle experience with oil workers, through a trade union dissidence, belonging to the official *Trade Union of the Oil Workers of the Mexican Republic* (STPRM). This experience culminated in the disastrous failure of the oil workers and our collective's exit from the trade union struggle. Many factors converged to make this failure so resounding and fruitless. The most serious of them: our misunderstanding of the tasks of communists within the labor movement.

Until now, the balance of that experience was a pending issue. In the following document, we try to critically analyze the mistakes made in order to elucidate the demands we communists have in the complex work among the working class.

We share this document so that any comrade interested in the tasks that communists must develop within the labor movement can critically analyze it and, if possible, draw the maximum lessons from this small experience.

Preamble

Since its origin, the peculiar development of capitalist industry in Mexico was characterized by the coexistence of different magnitudes of capital, different methods and processes of work, and the different weight that the State had as a driver of the capital accumulation process. In this context, industrial workers appeared, despite their essential objective identity, separated from each other by multiple aspects: regional distribution, non-conforming wage levels that vary from one industry to another and from one company to another; different levels of schooling, training and qualification, and, fundamentally, their organizational aspects.

Thus, since workers are not a homogeneous mass facing capital under equal circumstances, they also resolve the organized defense of their rights in different ways. Trade unions were formed in their origins as associations of workers that combatively defended their interests. However, this defense historically shows notable differences, not only in terms of the types of trade union associations, but also the existence of large masses of non-unionized workers marks deep differences within the working class regarding their possibility and bargaining power when it comes to defending and improving their working and living conditions. The very process of unionization presents differences: there are old trade unions alongside newly created ones, some the product of

long and bitter struggles, others are creations of the employers; sometimes there are trade unions that exist in the company before workers are hired, alongside others formed at the initiative of the most senior workers. All this is indicative of different traditions of struggle and organization, but also shows a marked absence of trade union tradition that allowed the State to build that "tradition" from the very center of bourgeois power.

When the development of industrial capitalism began in post-revolutionary Mexico, a system of interests was built from the State that -to this day- functions through a legally formalized "arrangement" between the trade unions, the bourgeoisie, and the State: the so-called corporate pact. In this corporate system, the State fulfills the functions of "guarantor" of class conciliation.

The 1917 Constitution legalized this corporate pact through its Article 123 (on labor rights), which assigns the State the role of "guardian" of labor and property rights, as well as "defender" of the new "revolutionary" order. The State, by law, is the main interlocutor of the social classes and also "promoter and guarantor" of "social rights". In this sense, this corporate pact -euphemistically called an "alliance"- between the workers' organizations and the capitalist State hides the real and formal subordination of the labor movement to the needs of capital reproduction and, therefore, to the State that guarantees that process.

Trade unions adapted to capitalist power through the corporatism legally sanctioned in Article 123, in labor laws, and in collective bargaining, which results in a lack of political and ideological independence of the working class.

Added to this lack of political and ideological independence of the workers' organizations are other problems that reinforce the subordination of the labor movement to the State and result in its complete subjugation: trade union practices that allow leaders to function as transmission belts of capital's policies within the proletariat and ensure the manipulation and control of workers, severely punishing attempts to fight for workers' autonomy and independence from the bourgeoisie and the State. These trade union leaders maintain themselves as a bureaucratic minority to the detriment of the working masses through the use of labor law and, if required, also through coercion protected by the repressive policies of the State. And the fact is that when these leaders feel, even minimally, that their existence is threatened by an insurgency or some rebellion, they have historically used all legal and extra-legal force to cool the spirits of the rebels.

Another fundamental element for the complete subordination of the workers is the idea of "revolutionary nationalism." To facilitate the development of capitalism in Mexico, the State undertook the task of building the legal framework, infrastructure, and strengthening its repressive apparatuses -army, courts, and prisons- but it also needed to construct a discourse that would justify "why the winners of the Revolution should remain at the top of political power based on their relationship with Mexico's past and with the country they wished to build for the future, based on the idea that we have always been the same people; that our greatest threats are internal division and foreign ambitions; the desire to achieve freedom, development, and social justice", all with the purpose of convincing the proletarian masses that these objectives would only be possible with a strong State that regulated the economy and satisfied all the needs of a society that was

too weak to protect itself. Thus, nationalism became the official ideological discourse necessary to give meaning to the actions undertaken by the State against the organization and struggle of the proletarian masses.

Thus, in the 1930s, the corporatism and the tradition of "revolutionary nationalism" developed under the impulse of national unity in the government of Lázaro Cárdenas, gave rise to the formation of the *Confederation of Mexican Workers* (CTM), which placed labor conflicts –and in particular the hard struggles promoted by oil workers– at the center of the national development project and the viability of the State that emerged from the Mexican revolution, and which provided the ideological justification for the subordinate alliance of official trade unionism with presidential power.

Thus, when the State decreed the expropriation of the oil industry in 1938, it hoped that this action would mitigate the struggle of the oil workers – who had founded their trade union a couple of years earlier – by seeking to regulate the constant labor-capital conflicts that had arisen since the start of hydrocarbon extraction in 1901. From this action was born the close historical collaboration between the State and the *Official Trade Union of Oil Workers of the Mexican Republic* (STPRM).

1. The Oil Trade Union

The STPRM is the national trade union of the oil industry, controlled by a bureaucracy colloquially called "caciquil" or "charra"¹. It is an example of the most authoritarian and corrupt official trade unionism, controlled by a leadership that has maintained a monopoly on power for decades; but unlike other trade unions with similar characteristics (miners, railroad workers, or teachers), this one has greater power precisely because of the strategic location of its workers in a branch of the economy of central importance and where the state company that runs it, *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Pemex), has the largest budget to operate within the entire national budget. The enormous power attributed to the trade union, which in reality belongs to the leadership, cannot be said to be used for the benefit of the workers, more than half of whom have temporary contracts. The wages of the oil industry, comparatively higher than in other branches, are due more to the company's productivity than to privileges at the expense of other layers of the working population. Wages, benefits, and the greatest privileges are concentrated among high-ranking company officials and the trade union leadership.

Since the creation of the STPRM, oil workers exercised a strong influence beyond the labor world, inserting themselves as political actors in the geographical areas where they

1 The term "charro trade unionism" (charrismo sindical) is used in Mexico to describe the corrupt and anti-democratic practices of the trade union movement. It refers to the control of trade unions by leaders called "charros" who act in their own interest and that of the employers, whether capitalists or the State. Their common practices are: the imposition of trade union leaders, the signing of "protection contracts" (contracts that benefit the bourgeoisie by keeping wages low, working hours long, and violating workers' rights), repression of dissidence, and simulation of conflicts, always maintaining links with companies and the State. The term comes from a corrupt railroad trade union leader linked to the Mexican government in the 1940s, Jesús Díaz de León, nicknamed "El Charro". His nickname was historically associated with corrupt trade union leaders. In short, "charrismo" or "charro trade unionism" is a mechanism of employer and governmental control over workers, disguised as labor representation.

established their workplaces; thus, their political activity developed in parallel with their trade union work. This political activity of the oil bosses regularly took place within the *Institutional Revolutionary Party* (PRI) -which governed Mexico for more than seventy years- although they were also involved in the founding of regional parties. Thus, the political participation of oil trade union leaders occurred within the framework of the lines designed by the PRI regime. At least until 1990, the oil trade union power was the most decisive local force in oil towns.

This combination of political and trade union functions carried out by the STPRM leaders allowed the establishment of veritable trade union dictatorships. Authoritarian regimes that were consolidated through the arbitrary use of laws and having as their main tool the corruption of judges, police, and other public officials, and even social and political intermediaries.

The power accumulated by the oil trade union allowed it to refine its labor control mechanisms, which have been the basis for the formation of dynasties of leaders who find continuity in the inheritance of jobs for their children and other relatives. The interests created by these oil dynasties have been defended through loyalty or terror. Loyalty is based on the fear of losing statutory rights, particularly the right to inherit the job; for this reason, the hand-raising election procedure remains in force. There is fear of subsequent administrative repression. As can be seen, subordination has been the central element of the oil workers' way of life.

Coercive actions are also an important element in maintaining the interests of trade union leaderships; however, repression against dissidents has fundamentally consisted of the annulment of their statutory rights and, to a lesser extent, direct physical aggression. This does not rule out frequent repression through beatings in the life of the oil trade union, but generally, workers fear losing their trade union rights more than physical aggression.

Due to the very demands of their vested interests within the trade union, trade union leaders have become specialists in destroying oil dissidents: for them, crushing the rights of a dissident is an important act of example for other nonconformists. There are examples of honest oil workers who staged important battles to "democratize" their trade union, but they were always the first to be "sacrificed" in labor struggles, or they never managed to achieve permanent worker status, or they lost it due to administrative repression through contract termination; several of them were even imprisoned, humiliated, or banished from their areas of residence. Many, despite having been victims of contract annulment, have continued to battle against the trade union structure -almost always through legal means- trying to regain their status as company workers. Furthermore, several of these terminated workers serve their community out of conviction by developing "extra-labor" social mobilizations, constituting themselves as "community advocates" in the face of a lack of basic services or in defense of projects that threaten the stability of the towns where they live or participate. Even in the 2018 electoral conjuncture, many oil dissidents dedicated themselves to organizing "citizens' networks" in support of the candidacies of the social-democratic party Morena², taking advantage of their knowledge of the rules of the trade union world in places where politics flows from within the trade union to local political life. And it is precisely in this context that a

2 Morena: National Regeneration Movement, a Mexican social-democratic political party.

dissidence emerged that fought to "recover" their trade union organization through the "democratization" of its elective bodies and the general secretariats of trade union sections: the *Grupo Unido Regeneración Sindical* (United Group for Trade Union Regeneration - GURS).

2. The Trade Union Dissidence

On March 18, 2018, after five days of a strenuous march, a small group of oil workers from different regions of the country, mainly from the southern state of Tabasco, arrived in Mexico City. They were members of the *Grupo Unido Regeneración Sindical* (GURS), a dissident collective within the powerful and corrupt STPRM.

The members of GURS stood alone at the foot of the Monument to the Mexican Revolution, located in the city center. From there, they launched slogans against the corrupt leadership of the oil trade union and challenged the threats of dismissal from the employer, the state company *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Pemex).

Made up of unionized and trusted workers³, GURS claimed to be fighting for the democratization of the oil trade union through respect for "free and secret voting in trade union elections," as well as for "the non-reelection of trade union leaders and the defense of the Collective Labor Agreement (CLA)". They openly sought to remove the trade union leadership, which at that time had been headed for 26 years by the politically influential and highly corrupt Senator Carlos Romero Deschamps⁴. They also positioned themselves against the *Energy Reform*⁵ promoted by the Mexican government, through which -the workers argued- "Pemex is being dismantled both in terms of its assets and the displacement of personnel"; hence their mobilization was called the *Exodus for the Second Oil Expropriation*.

The GURS workers had been restless within the oil trade union for years: in 2015, they conducted their struggle at the legal level by promoting a collective injunction against the harmful modifications to their CLA. That same year, they carried out a series of "staggered work stoppages" in some trade union sections -out of the 36 that make up the STPRM- demanding the recovery of workers' spaces on the board of directors of the state company, as well as rejecting the Energy Reform. In August of that year, some members of the dissident collective had their contracts terminated as a repressive measure for their activism in favor of trade union democratization. Since then, GURS members continued to be the object of repression by the trade union leadership amidst harassment, threats, beatings, and unjustified dismissals.

3 *Unionized workers* are those who are members of the trade union and covered by the collective agreement. *Trusted workers* are those in management or supervisory positions who are not typically allowed to join trade unions under Mexican labor law.

4 *Carlos Romero Deschamps*: Mexican politician and former oil trade union leader, senator for the PRI, widely accused of corruption and illegal enrichment.

5 The *Energy Reform* was a constitutional change presented by the head of the executive branch on August 12, 2013. The scope of the legislative change was the energy policy of the Mexican State, especially regarding oil and its exploitation. The government's intention was to partially liberalize that market. Although the reform maintained ownership of the hydrocarbon deposits in the hands of the State, its approval opened up the possibility for them to be exploited by private companies.

GURS was not the only organized dissident group within the enormous oil trade union. Many other collectives have existed, but unlike these, the members of the Grupo Unido Regeneración Sindical were the most active in carrying out protests, mobilizations, forums, congresses, and talks.

On that March 18, during the GURS protest, its members recognized that a possible change in the federal government in favor of social democracy opened an important conjuncture for trade union life at Pemex. The candidate of the social-democratic *party Morena*, López Obrador, during his electoral campaign had committed to the oil trade union to guarantee free elections in their trade union: "workers must freely choose their representatives and what was formerly known colloquially as charro trade unionism must end; there must be free and direct voting by workers for the election of leaders at Pemex," said the candidate. With this "commitment" from reformism, GURS prepared to prepare its candidates to compete in the trade union elections with the expectation of achieving the "democratization" of their trade union body.

Concurrently with the GURS demonstration, in the state of Yucatán, Romero Deschamps and the leadership of the oil trade union commemorated the 1938 oil expropriation alongside the Mexican government.

3. Our Struggle in the Oil Trade Union

In 2016, our former collective called the *Frente Oriente, proletario y combatiente* (Oriente Front, Proletarian and Combative) –constituted in 2012, and from whose nucleus of militants some of us continue to organize ourselves and work today in the *Colectivo Obrero Comunista* (Communist Workers' Collective)– began our "struggle activity" among the working class. We developed propaganda and agitation, with little success, in the factory zones of the Valley of Mexico, as well as articulation with the workers of the *National Coordination of Education Workers* (CNTE), specifically with comrades from Section 10 in Mexico City; Section 23 in the state of Puebla; and with the *State Coordination of Education Workers of Guerrero* (CETEG). It was not until 2018, in the context of the GURS mobilization in Mexico City, that we came into contact with this dissident group.

As mentioned above, GURS fought for the "democratization" of the STPRM, and in that battle we decided to join in order to support their demands. However, improvisation and our misunderstanding of trade unionism led us to believe that this struggle could result in a victory for GURS and the possibility for us to extend the task of raising workers' consciousness toward revolutionary positions throughout all the trade union sections of the STPRM. In this sense, we considered that "agitating" against the "Energy Reform," which violated workers' rights and outlined the insertion of transnational capital into the state company Pemex, was an important beginning to appeal to the unity of the oil trade union. Thus, we addressed the worker base:

«Faced with this [the energy reform], the need for unity among the workers of the trade union is fundamental, because, with the premeditated dismantling of Pemex, oil

workers will be left at the mercy of foreign companies, which are experts in exploiting the labor force of dependent countries like ours. The labor reform imposed in 2012, which liquidates historic workers' conquests, is a perfect scenario for these companies to achieve the greatest appropriation of energy resources at the lowest cost.

Under these circumstances, the defense of workers' labor rights necessarily requires their unity, because without it, workers will be left at the mercy of the exploitative policies of the most rapacious capital. It is necessary to note that all the labor conquests that have now been wiped out with a stroke of the pen were only achieved through the broad unity and struggle of workers from different trade unions, which cost them repression, imprisonment, and blood, but due to *charro trade unionism* and corporatism, this unity has been pulverized and organization has been practically annihilated. However, the need to build democratic labor and trade union spaces has also led to resistance from different organized groups in various sectors, such as the oil sector; thus, we must align ourselves with these spaces of labor and community resistance in order to halt the imperialist desires for greater dispossession and oppression of the working class and the people as a whole.»⁶

From the above quote, three lines of reasoning emerge that would mark the tactic we would follow in light of GURS's objectives of "trade union freedom" and our own objective of "raising workers' consciousness". With our first line of reasoning, we de facto inserted ourselves into a reactionary nationalist policy as the axis of workers' unity: by placing the most relevant point of our tactic on the opprobrious arrival of transnational companies at Pemex, what we did was reinforce the "anti-foreign" spirit of the oil workers, thereby annihilating any internationalist perspective and effectively reinforcing chauvinist positions that have historically been one of the fundamental elements of ideological domination over the labor movement. The oil trade union has historically been deeply nationalist, and instead of firmly combating these positions, we ended up reinforcing them, thereby consolidating bourgeois domination among oil workers. Thus, from this perspective, in the Frente Oriente we ended up framed within the counterrevolution, suggesting to the oil workers that they make their own the nationalist slogan "Pemex belongs to Mexicans", thereby violating the autonomy of the class and prostrating it to the defense of the interests of "its" bourgeoisie.

Nationalism wrapped in the "defense of the country's strategic resources" is one of the most mentioned and articulated discourses of the left wing of capital and has become a common slogan among counterrevolutionary organizations and parties that call themselves communist or revolutionary. We placed ourselves in this tradition, tailgating the most reactionary positions of inter-classism and trade unionism, unconsciously renouncing the struggle for the disappearance of capitalism and instead launching slogans in favor of "national capitalism".

Secondly, we were incapable of clearly understanding the function of positive law within bourgeois domination against the proletariat and ended up advocating for the defense of "labor rights" as a "unifying element" of the oil workers' movement, because by affirming that with the elimination of these rights "workers will be left at the mercy of the exploitative policies of the most rapacious capital," we ignored that the working class

6 Frente Oriente. *La lucha de los trabajadores petroleros frente a la depredación capitalista*, Ponencia para el "Foro de Trabajadores Petroleros", Villahermosa, Tabasco, México, 30 de mayo de 2018.

must fight for the abolition of wage labor and not for a better sale of its labor power; furthermore, we ended up suggesting that the exploiters are the most "rapacious" capitalists, generating confusion among the class because it then seems that there are "less rapacious" capitalists who exploit less. This problem is also frequent in the labor movement, as there is a cult of "legalism," a juridical fetishism, that ends up restricting the workers' struggle to approaches within the sphere of state reform, which shapes its domination through its legal approaches expressed as a consensual form of political domination over the working class.

Thirdly, we promoted the idea of "trade union democracy" as a fundamental element on the path to emancipation of the working class. Under the Leninist premise of "working within the trade unions however reactionary they may be", we completely lost the historical objectivity of the role and function of trade unions in contemporary capitalism. The absence of an in-depth study of the trade union, of workers' corporatization, and of the role of communists among the proletarian masses led us to improvise within the oil workers' movement and led us to a lamentable reformist policy that proposed framing workers within that trade union structure that had dominated and subjugated them for decades. That is, faced with our misunderstanding of Marxism and faced with our irrational spontaneism and activism, we substituted our ignorance with the "traditional forms of trade union work" implemented by the left wing of capital and by "red counterrevolution". The fact is that a good part of the positions of the self-proclaimed "communist organizations" have prolonged for years the "correct forms of doing workers' work" that manifest themselves in red folklorism, traditional workers' movementism, uncritical exaltation of the masses, and the most grotesque opportunism: from those ideas we drank, and to those "traditions" we attached ourselves.

Together with GURS, we managed to travel to and hold propaganda meetings in sections 14 (Ciudad Pemex, Tabasco), 23 (Minatitlán, Veracruz), and 30 (Poza Rica, Veracruz). There we promoted talks, study circles, and forums with oil workers, but always under the logic of the defense of labor rights, opposition to the transnationalization of Pemex, and trade union democracy. Apart from the GURS workers themselves, in none of these sections did we manage to influence the trade union practices of the workers, despite our efforts.

In this context, the 2018 presidential campaign intensified, and within the dissident groups of the STPRM, support cells began to emerge for the candidacy of the Morena party and particularly for its presidential candidate, López Obrador, who during a campaign trip in the state of Tabasco promised workers that if he reached the presidency of the Republic, he would enforce trade union democracy in the STPRM and would preserve Pemex as "property of the nation". This was a devastating blow to our pretensions of raising the "class consciousness" of the oil workers. The workers from the various dissident groups abandoned their grassroots struggle for "trade union democratization" and became promoter groups for the Morena party candidate -including GURS- as they blindly trusted that the new social-democratic president would fulfill "from above" the most deeply felt demands of the "democratic" workers.

GURS practically abandoned its trade union struggle and replaced it with approaches to the Morena party candidates in their areas of influence in order to "tie down" agreements

that, according to them, would allow them to compete for trade union positions. The culminating point in our relationship with the oil workers was a public pronouncement by GURS to the oil worker base stating:

«(...) The so-called *nationalist* path presupposes the reactualization of the national development project outlined embryonically in the 1917 Constitution. This project raises the need to carry out a vast program of economic and social reforms with the purpose of achieving, in the shortest possible time, an effective economic and social integration and a substantial reduction in prevailing inequality and marginality.

(...) We affirm that this option, that is, the nationalist project, is the most solid and consistent path that popular forces have today to advance toward a deeper and more widespread social change.

(...) Therefore, as a precursor to various national demands, specifically those of the energy sector of our country, it is that in this moment of impending political change, the oil workers openly declare ourselves for the candidate of the National Regeneration Movement (Morena), Lic. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and with this certainty and confidence we request the clear and decisive support, together with all the people of Mexico, to recover the energy industry, specifically, our company Pemex, in favor of the nation and of Mexicans.»⁷

This GURS communiqué is an example of the perspectives that have historically dominated a large part of the Mexican labor movement. But it is also the result of an incorrect policy that our collective developed within the oil trade union, as mentioned. Thus, our lack of clarity regarding class independence, our misunderstanding of proletarian internationalism, and our cult of reformism and legalism prevented us from establishing a consistently revolutionary line and, on the contrary, condemned us to ending up tailgating social democracy and reaction.

Very late we confronted these nationalist and parliamentarist ideas; and when we did, our oil worker "allies" had no qualms about breaking with our collective and with our misguided ideas.

Thus, our intense work within the oil trade union meant nothing in the class struggle and even less in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.

Likewise, we note that this small experience of struggle among the working class is a poor one -undoubtedly, it is- however, we have seen that these types of "tactics" are frequent in the action of organizations attempting to do honest work within the class, so our experience can and should serve for the tactical definitions of communists within the labor movement.

⁷ GURS. *Pronunciamiento petrolero*, folleto, Villahermosa, Tabasco, México, junio de 2018. (underlined in the original)

5. Results and Conclusions

Our praxis within the working class was developed from the perspectives of counterrevolution. Workerism, reformism, legalism, nationalism, and the cult of spontaneity shaped the organizational work carried out by those of us who were part of the Frente Oriente. The most palpable example of this policy is the work that the organization carried out within the oil trade union. Our approaches were based on the erroneous workerist logic where the fundamental issue was not for the oil workers to end the exploitation relations to which they are subjected, but rather to improve the conditions under which they sell their labor power, and even more so when it comes to "foreign companies," where we exhibited a crude nationalism due to the absence of an internationalist perspective.

Thus, from this reformist logic, we called on oil workers to fight not against capitalism but for the "defense of labor rights" from the most execrable juridical fetishism, reducing revolutionary politics to trade union politics.

In this sense, we can affirm that due to the lack of an authentically revolutionary program and due to our serious theoretical omissions, we championed the politics of reformism and counterrevolution embedded both in the labor movement and in the multitude of organizations that claim to be Marxist but are actually cacique-like and clientelist structures, which we, from our ignorance, considered "revolutionary" because of their names and their pseudo-radical discourse.

Although it is true that we were clear that *charro trade unionism* and corporatism are burdens within the proletarian organization, we erroneously sought to eliminate them through the "democratization" of the trade union, a situation that evidenced our misunderstanding that the trade union is one of the main spaces of corporatization and the trade union bureaucracy is a product of it.

In conclusion, the practice of the Frente Oriente within the labor movement was incorrect in all its lines of action; precisely for this reason, we cast the struggle of the oil proletariat into the legalistic and trade union limits, as if the deployment of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat should be contained or regulated from a stagist, totally mechanistic perspective. And although it was considered that the oil proletariat should be at the forefront of the struggle of the rest of the classes, in reality it was subordinated to the "struggle of resistance" against dispossession: once again placing the cult of spontaneism and nationalist perspectives before revolutionary struggle.

6. Some Lessons from the Self-Criticism of Our Experience

- i. The proletariat does not begin its path from a position of clarity and autonomy as a class. It begins from life under capital, a life that subjects it, amidst relationships that generate and perpetuate its alienation, as well as the loss of the means of production and its own living conditions. That is why the prevailing ideology is, in general, that of the ruling class.

ii. The proletarian struggle is neither mere spontaneity nor external instruction, but a contradictory practical process where class consciousness, fragmented vision, illusion, and clarification are intertwined.

iii. Communist consciousness does not emerge automatically or self-evidently from discomfort or precariousness. It develops in practical struggle against capital, in discussion within the class, and through revolutionary minorities that articulate the course latent in the movement itself.

iv. Bourgeois ideology sinks its roots into real social relations: nationalism, citizenship, equality before the law -which conceals class domination- the cult of commodity exchange, the fetishism of money, the belief that social value is reduced to market value, the illusion that commodities naturally possess exchange value, and the idea that society is nothing more than a set of individuals exchanging equivalents.

v. Under capitalism, the trade union is the instrument for defending the purchase of labor power by capital and tends to integrate itself into the State. Trade union corporations thus become instruments for controlling the oscillations and displacements of the labor power employed by capital in the different branches of production.

vi. At present, the trade union is an organization of capital, a product of class antagonism. Pretending to "democratize" it is the petty-bourgeois opportunist attempt to attenuate the class struggle or to democratically cloak the organization of capital.

vii. Although the trade union has been assimilated as an organization of capital, it remains an essential task for communists to thoroughly analyze the form and content of the organizations that the working class needs for its defensive struggle in non-revolutionary and pre-revolutionary times.

viii. The struggle of the proletariat begins defensively. The proletariat must transform defensive struggle into autonomous class organization.

ix. The task of communists is neither to uncritically venerate everything that workers express nor to condemn them from a supposed ideological superiority. The task consists of distinguishing between the class position of the proletariat and the ideologies through which it lives and often mistakenly interprets.

x. Revolutionary minorities do not place themselves above the working class, nor do they dissolve into what the class feels at any given moment. They are an organized part of the labor movement that accumulates historical experience, clarifies ideas, critiques strategy, disseminates communist thought, agitates, and acts directly in the struggles.

xi. The essential task of revolutionary minorities, our *raison d'être*, is to revolutionize and clarify the mind of the proletariat through our own revolutionary praxis. Communists do not make the revolution, we do not plan it, we do not create the struggles; what we must do unequivocally is to ensure that the proletariat clearly and plainly follows the only possible route: the path of communism, the path of the proletarian revolution.

xii. Communism is the real movement through which the proletariat, mobilized by the contradictions of capitalism, begins to recognize itself in struggle: it confronts the conditions that fragment it and advances toward forms of collective life opposed to the dominion of exchange value, commerce, the bourgeois State, and imperialist war.

xiii. The historical form of political organization of the revolutionary proletariat is represented by the workers' councils, which have always arisen in periods where the radicalization of the class struggle leads them to strive for the conquest of political power. However, the most conscious proletarian combatants, those best prepared for revolutionary struggle, have also historically developed an appropriate historical form for their political and organizational gathering: the party. The historical party of these proletarian combatants can only exist on condition that it champions a communist program and develops a communist essence.

xiv. Thus, during times of low class confrontation, communists propagate in advance - through their propaganda and political agitation- the essential elements of Marxism in order to facilitate the proletariat's understanding of the need to destroy capitalism, of its self-emancipation, and of the construction of communist society; but it does this from within the class, catalyzing the development of its proletarian consciousness. This is how communists build *referentiality* towards the communist revolutionary program.

xv. During times of revolutionary upsurge, communists must raise their program, the slogans, and the orientations that the masses recognize as correct because they manage to see in them their own aspirations in the most adequate form, thus imprinting revolutionary *directionality* on the struggle of the proletariat.

7. A Conclusion That Challenges Us

The experience expounded here allows us to clarify some questions about our past praxis, but it still places us far from reaching conclusive judgments; on the contrary, it opens paths for us to think critically about the role that revolutionary minorities must assume within the labor movement.

The 15 points we have put forward as lessons from our experience are a qualitative synthesis of our reasoning about our own praxis, the elements expressed in our *Manifesto*⁸, and the critical observations sent to us by comrades Aníbal, MS., SS., and Fredo Corvo from "Letters Against War"⁹.

8 "Manifesto of the Communist Workers' Collective to the Communists of the World". <https://colectivoobrerocomunista.wordpress.com/2026/04/20/manifesto-of-the-communist-workers-collective/>

9 Contained in the *Critical Notes to the Manifesto of the Communist Workers' Collective*, prepared by Fredo Corvo (available at: <https://colectivoobrerocomunista.wordpress.com/2026/04/22/critical-notes-on-the-manifesto-of-the-communist-workers-collective/>) and to the critical notes of the comrades from "Letters Against War" contained in *Letters Against War No. 1: Notes on Proletarian Consciousness, Capitalism, Imperialism, and Autonomous Struggle* (available at: https://leftdis.wordpress.com/2026/04/24/letters-against-war-nr-1-24-4-2026/#_Toc227941247)

However, for us, a pending task is the meticulous analysis of trade unions as managers of labor power assimilated into the bourgeois State; but also of the defensive forms of organization of workers in non-revolutionary periods that arise as autonomous structures of their own struggle. This analysis must necessarily address the character and historical composition of the workers' councils in times of revolutionary upsurge while also elucidating the support that communists must offer to the autonomous forms of organization of the proletarian struggle and the consequent rejection of all institutional mediation of the proletariat to the State and the bourgeoisie. This analysis -still in development- we will publish soon.

For the generalization of the defensive struggles of the proletariat!

For the autonomous organization of the proletarian struggle!

For class consciousness forged in struggle!

For the workers' councils and international proletarian power!

Workers of the world, unite!

Communist Workers' Collective

June 6, 2026